

# VIA WIRELESS

Novelized by Thompson Buchanan From the Successful Play of the Same Name  
By WINCHELL SMITH, FREDERIC THOMPSON and PAUL ARMSTRONG

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(Continued.)

"Yes, of course we had to have some one," she agreed. "Won't you sit down? I'd quite given up all idea of ever seeing you again. I'm glad we've met."

"I didn't know that you would ever want to see me again," ventured Sommers as they sat down.

"The girl's face smiled. This was the time when there must be some explanation, and her sense of awkwardness made her feel that the explanation should come from her."

"I've wanted to see you ever since that night in the furnace room," she said at last, "to ask your forgiveness."

Sommers shook his head. "No; I have nothing to forgive, Miss Durant. It is I who must ask forgiveness. If I could only make you understand how much I've regretted that night and my outburst!"

"The girl smiled with unconscious tenderness."

"You had every right to ask what you did. I had given you the right," she said softly.

"The man sighed."

"Nothing could give me the right to act as I did that night," he said bitterly. "I've been punished for it."

Impulsively she held out her hand to him across the table.

"Let us forget all about that," she said. "I want to work on a very silly errand that night. Some time I'll tell you all about it. We mustn't waste time about that now, though, when we have just a few minutes together."

"A few minutes?" exclaimed Sommers. "You don't mean that I'm only going to meet you to say goodbye?"

Frances nodded.

"I'm afraid that's it for the present," she said. "We're sailing this afternoon."

"And I'll be on sea duty for two years," sighed the man bitterly.

It was just as hard for the girl, but the knowledge that she was loved helped to buoy her up.

"Then we must make the best of the time we have," she said. "Tell me what you've been doing since I saw you last."

Sommers shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing to tell. Been at sea, that's all," he said.

"But surely you do something at sea?" persisted the girl.

He was still too disconsolate at the thought of parting to quite lift himself into her mood.

"Oh, we eat and sleep, and I've taken up wireless in my spare moments. I expect you know why. I've been interested in it ever since you gave me my first lesson in your workshop."

"Can you send and take?" she asked eagerly.

"A little, but I am slow at it."

The girl was leaning on the table now in her eagerness, for already an idea had occurred to her.

"I can send well now," she exclaimed. "I spent lots of time in the Irves's little wireless room. It seems so much more wonderful on sea than it did on land. Oh, the mystery of it all!"

"Think of being away off to sea, about in a boat, with nothing but sky and water anywhere in sight, and to have one who is—she hesitated a moment, and a bright flush rose to her cheeks, and she looked at him quickly."

"I mean, of course, if there should be some one very dear to you on that same ocean. You don't know where, how near or how far, but by touching a key you can send your thoughts flying in every direction, and the little wave currents bearing your message will quiver around him, brush by him, perhaps touch his cheek in passing, and you wonder if he feels it!"

The man was looking at her queerly. "By Jove, that's strange!" he said, low, as she finished.

Frances laughed teasingly.

"Why, have you ever felt a message dancing about you?" she questioned.

Sommers shook his head.

"No, but the Rosanoke did. It was very singular, I assure you. I was in the wireless room one night a couple of weeks ago talking to the operator—the girl leaned forward with sudden, tense eagerness—"when suddenly, without a call or getting our response or any preliminary that the well regulated message indulges in before coming to you, over our recorder there came clicking in a wonder message."

His voice softened to a note of tenderness.

"It was a message of love—the tenderest and sweetest I've ever known. No one could tell for whom it was intended. I don't think it knew itself. It had gone astray."

"It was sent by a woman—it must have been—and it found a home with me. Not a man on that ship but carries it now in his heart. May I tell it to you?"

The girl was looking at him, her heart in her eyes.

"A love message? Of course," she said softly. "But how extraordinary!"

Sommers nodded.

"Wasn't it? It seemed almost cruel that such a dear little message, so innocent and pure, should have been thrown out into this hard old world of ours to die through the air, through heat and cold and storm, vainly seeking an owner, going on and on, miles and miles, in every direction, until at last it became weak and faint—and died."

"But you see, it didn't die," added the girl tenderly.

"No," said the man. "By some chance as it flew by us we caught it, and we loved it. That message will live until the last man on that ship has found his fight."

"And it was sent to no one in particular?" questioned the girl.

"To you," he answered.

"To me?" she exclaimed, startled.

Sommers shook his head, smiling. "No, no, that was the address. Listen: 'To you, my own one, I send this little message overflowing with my love.'"

He was bending across the table eagerly, speaking low the wonder message that had come to him; giving it back, his own declaration of love to the girl.

"Yes," said she softly, for she understood.

At her tone an intuition came to him. He caught her look. He, too, understood. And so he dared misquote a little.

"Should I ever reach you, would you know it came from me?"

"No, no, it wasn't that," exclaimed Frances sharply. Then she stopped abruptly, the crimson rushing to her face.

"What's the matter? Didn't I get it right?" he asked, with pretended innocence.

The girl, caught, now was trembling. "Why, how should I know?"

The pretense of innocence was hopeless. He shook his head, smiling tenderly.

"How should you know? Because you sent it. Oh, that message was like you, only—"

"Only what?" she asked.

He looked at her with a queer smile. "Only every other fellow thought it was like some one else. Did you send it to any one in particular?"

The girl lifted her eyes to his with a sudden shy dawning very sweet to see.

"How was it addressed?" she asked.

The man's hands were trembling as he leaned toward her.

"Tell me, please," he begged.

Faltering, she looked down.

"To you," she said very softly.

Without a word, careless of who might see, the man of action caught her hand and, leaning across the table, kissed her.

"Lieutenant Sommers?"

The same cool voice which had startled Frances earlier now made the two start apart guiltily. Sommers looked up angrily. The big man with the shrewd eyes was standing beside the table, his face as unemotional as though carved from stone.

"What do you want?" asked the naval officer sharply.

"My name is Bradley," said the man. "United States secret service. I've brought a message to you from Washington, lieutenant."

"Well?"

"You are wanted at Washington, lieutenant, to answer some questions at the court of inquiry."

With an involuntary exclamation of fear and sympathy, Frances stood closer to her lover. He was staring at the secret service man, astounded.

"A court of inquiry?"

Bradley nodded.

"Yes, sir. Your gun exploded three weeks ago. Two men were killed outright and three mangled. One will be blinded if he lives."

CHAPTER XXII.

"DON'T YOU SEE I LOVE YOU?"

"TWO dead; three mangled; one blind!"

Slowly, in dazed, mechanical fashion, Sommers repeated the awful summary of his failure. Frances' face was horror stricken, too, but with a quick, impulsive gesture of love and faith she put her hand on his arm.

"It isn't your fault," she said. "I know it isn't your fault."

His hand caught hers with a quick grip of thanks for the renewed courage her sympathy and faith brought him.

"Won't you leave us now?" he said, low. "I'll see you and tell you what he has to say."

Reluctantly the girl bowed and hurried away into the hotel to wait there alone until her lover could see her. When she had gone Sommers turned quickly to Bradley.

The secret service man had been standing there, his face expressionless, but his shrewd eyes taking in and his keen brain analyzing all that had transpired.

"Why was I not informed of this before?" asked Sommers, still partly dazed.

"They decided to keep it from you until you came ashore," replied the secret service man. "How it all happened will be decided at the court of inquiry. I have been on the case since the accident occurred. Your gun stood the test at the proving ground. It's my opinion that it was killed in the tempering bath."

A wave of light swept over Sommers. He saw everything now. It was all plain. He understood why a drunken foreman had been left in charge of the job. He knew why Pinckney had been

so solicitous. He realized why, finally, he himself had been assaulted in the last desperate effort to keep him from witnessing the transfer of the gun to the tempering bath.

Finally he understood why Frances had come there that night. She must have suspected, and she had come to save him. The thought of the dastardly trick enraged him.

"It was killed in the tempering bath! I swear it was!" Sommers exclaimed fiercely. "Pinckney was in the room that night at the Durant works. He's here—here at this hotel. I'll settle with him!"

He had taken a step when the secret service man caught him by the arm.

"Easy, lad, easy!" he cautioned. "Don't lose your head! I've made investigations in Pittsburgh, and I'm going to question Mr. Pinckney myself."

With a desperate effort under the restraining hand Sommers regained his self control. His mind began to work again logically, shrewdly. He saw what he had to do and how he must help this friendly officer.

To be Continued.)

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